



Grassroots Network

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Grassroots Coordinator Network?

The Grassroots Coordinator Network would consist of 10 field offices staffed by 14 new and 3 existing staff who would serve as grassroots coordinators. Their job would be to work with city officials and the regional divisions of the League to aggressively promote key League legislative priorities with legislators, district staff, local media and other supporting community groups.

Why do we need a Grassroots Network?

The Network proposal was developed by a task force (see page 4 for a list of task force members) authorized by the League Board of Directors as part of its strategic planning process. It responds to the deep frustration of many local officials about the cities' loss of political clout, compared with other, better-positioned interest groups that contribute millions of dollars to campaigns.

The concept of establishing local field offices is used very successfully by political campaigns, as well as by teachers, labor and other statewide membership organizations. These groups find that a network of field offices is a well-tested means to communicate with a dispersed membership, and to mobilize local support for the organization's causes. A recent survey by researchers at Wake Forest University found that key congressional staff, as well as government and public affairs executives, ranked grassroots activities as more effective in influencing the outcome of legislation than corporate or contract lobbying, campaign contributions or advocacy advertising. California's powerful education lobby must agree: they recently launched a new, high profile and well-funded grassroots organization called EdVoice. These are the interests against which the League must compete in Sacramento.

How will cities benefit from this proposal?

The goal of the Grassroots Network is to focus on major issues of concern to all cities, such as fiscal reform, increased funding for transportation and local control. Cities will benefit from the increased visibility of city issues in local and statewide media, and by holding legislators accountable back home for the votes they cast in Sacramento.

The potential payback for this investment is enormous. For example, on a statewide basis the proposed \$1.6 million dues increase needed to pay for the network is equivalent to only **four one hundredths of one percent (0.04%)** of the annual \$3.8 million cities receive in sales and use taxes. It is **one tenth of one percent of the \$1.57 billion** cities receive each year in VLF revenues. Portions of both VLF and sales and use tax revenues are at risk from legislative raids if the state suffers another recession.

The costs are also relatively small when compared to the expenditures made by organizations that compete with cities and the League for the allocation of dollars in Sacramento. For example, the 1999-2000 legislative session just two of the statewide public employee unions¹ that sponsored or lobbied for SB 402 (the binding arbitration bill) reported spending about \$3.1 million in campaign contributions to legislators, candidates for statewide office or

current statewide office holders, in addition to their expenditures for in-house or contract lobbying. During the same period, the California Teachers Association, which competes very effectively for funding in Sacramento, reported spending approximately \$2.7 million on lobbying expenses on education issues. In the same period, the CTA also spent approximately \$6.3 million on campaign contributions to legislators, candidates for statewide office and current statewide office holders, and \$35.2 million on initiative campaigns to further advance their policy agenda.

What would the grassroots coordinators do?

The coordinator's role is to increase the impact of the League's 16 regional divisions, by helping busy city officials focus strategic attention on state legislators' and the governor's decisions affecting cities. The coordinators will work to build relationships with local elected and appointed officials, local media, and other individuals and organizations in the region who might be called upon to be part of a local coalition on a particular League initiative or pending legislation.

The coordinators' would:

- Arrange meetings for city officials with legislators, plan news conferences, organize letter writing and media campaigns, and coordinate grassroots efforts with community groups with similar agendas.
- Support mayors, council members and city managers in drafting sample letters from cities; and train city staff on understanding and accessing the legislative process.
- Provide regular presentations on legislative developments and insight into the political dynamics influencing legislative developments.
- Meet regularly with legislative staff, media representatives and community groups about the League's legislative priorities.

What kind of person will be hired to staff the Network?

Everyone associated with this project has concluded that the best way to make this Network effective is to hire seasoned, professional, political organizers, not policy analysts or technical people right out of college. The budget provides an attractive salary and benefit package to do this. In addition to reassigning some League staff, we expect to recruit savvy political people who have worked on legislative or local elections, staffed legislative offices, or worked in public affairs or campaign consulting firms.

Where will the field offices be located?

The 10 field offices would be located around the state to ensure that coordinators are available to serve each of the League's 16 geographic divisions, while still balancing the need to maintain close contact with legislative districts and to be accessible to all cities. A map of the distribution by region is available in the information packet developed by the League. The League will send out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to solicit interest by cities in hosting a coordinator. The goal will be to achieve the highest impact on League lobbying and greatest visibility among members, while still keeping expenses as low as possible.

How does the Network relate to the ABC effort?

Action for Better Cities was created to make expenditures and engage in “political” activities such as statewide initiative campaigns. Recently, through in-kind contributions of staff time and strategic counsel, ABC was able to play a major role in helping to defeat Proposition 37, the initiative that would have severely limited cities’ abilities to impose fees to support local regulatory activities and provide services. While both the proposed Network and ABC share a similar objective, namely to gain more political clout for cities, the Network coordinators will focus on organizing local activities in support of League legislative positions. ABC will lead any initiative effort in support of fiscal stability and similar objectives.

Our city already pays a lobbyist. Why do we need this network too?

The Network doesn’t replace the ongoing need to have a strong lobbying presence in Sacramento. (In fact, part of the task force recommendation which has been approved by the League Board of Directors is to set aside at least \$50,000/year in the budget to hire contract lobbyists in Sacramento to assist League staff at strategic times on some key issues.) Cities that currently have their own contract or in-house lobbyist will probably continue to find that having their own representation makes sense, for two reasons.

First, the League’s lobbying program represents the interests of all 476 cities. It lobbies the legislature on matters of statewide importance to cities, and cannot provide the representation needed to address the individual needs of cities or even a single region. Second, the grassroots coordinators will be networking and organizing people, not lobbyists. This work will support and enhance the efforts of all city lobbyists, regardless of whether they are contractors or in-house staff. Several prominent contract lobbyists who represent individual cities have commented that they see the network proposal as complementary to their ability to represent their clients.

What criteria will be used to measure the Network’s effectiveness?

The League board specified that, if the Network were approved by the membership, the board would set both long-term goals and annualized objectives for the program and report them to the membership. The board also required that the League engage the services of a consultant to conduct a professional membership survey that establishes a base line of information about city officials’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the League’s legislative advocacy efforts and the relative level of involvement of city officials in support of that advocacy work. The board’s intention is to repeat that survey at the end of year three and following year five, comparing changing attitudes and levels of efforts.

How will the League be held accountable for the Network’s success or failure?

In addition to the survey to assess members’ perceptions and actual involvement in grassroots activities, the board also directed the staff to (1) establish a separate Grassroots Network account in the League budget, so that members can track Network expenses; (2) publish an annual legislative voting records report, including a ranking of legislators and the Governor on key city issues; (3) report board goals and annual legislative and policy objectives to the membership; (4) provide regular reports at the Executive Forum, Annual Conference and League department and division meetings; and (5) provide periodic reports to the membership.

Will this new program have a sunset date?

On or before the end of the sixth year of the program (December 31, 2007), the board will ask the membership to vote on the question of continuing the program. If the membership votes against the program continuation, the Network would be shut down, and cease operations by no later than the end of the seventh year (December 31, 2008).

What will it cost?

The estimated annualized cost is \$1.6 million, spread among all member cities. This estimate is based upon the following assumptions:

- Several current League staff members will be reassigned. Approximately 14 new staff will be hired.
- Much of the cost for the individual offices will be subsidized by the cities where the office is located, for example, by making office space and support staff available within a city facility.

How will costs be distributed?

Costs would be distributed among all cities based upon the League's dues structure, which is based on population. Some small cities pay only a few hundred dollars, while the largest cities pay tens of thousands of dollars. The median dues statewide are currently about \$4,930. The Network would increase median dues by approximately \$2,588.²

When would a dues increase start?

If the membership votes to approve the bylaw amendment the proposed dues increase would be effective on July 1, 2001.

Grassroots Lobbying Task Force

Harriet Miller, *Mayor, Santa Barbara* - **Chair**

John Thompson, *City Manager, Vacaville, and President of the City Managers' Department* – **Vice Chair**

Eileen Ansari, *Council Member, Diamond Bar*

Harry Armstrong, *Council Member, Clovis*

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Patsy Marshall, *Council Member, Buena Park*

Dave Mora, *City Manager, Salinas*

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Greg Pettis, *Council Member, Cathedral City*

Mike Siminski, *Council Member, Lompoc*

Armour Smith, *Vice Mayor, Modesto*

Anne Solem, *Council Member, Mill Valley*

Richard Tefank, *Former Chief of Police, Buena Park*

Ruth Vreeland, *Council Member, Monterey*

Endnote

¹ The California Professional Firefighters Association and the Police Officers Research Association of California.

² For purposes of establishing the grassroots network, the \$5,000 dues cap in League bylaws article IV, section 2, is would be suspended for the years 2001 and 2002. The dues cap will apply to base dues without interruption and will apply to total dues in year 2003 and years following.